

# FISH NAMES IN LANGUAGES OF TONGA AND FIJI

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides a record of fish names from two locations in the central Pacific, these being the Vava'u Islands of Tonga, and Taveuni area in northern Fiji. The *Handbook for the Collection of Fish Names in Pacific Languages* by G.L. Barnett provided a method for the collection of these data during field work at the two places which culturally are part of West Polynesia. Interviews and discussions with fishers yielded a record of the Tongan language names and Fijian language names of approximately 50 fishes that occur in the waters of these islands. These terms are collated with the English names and scientific identifications. The names are the contemporary ones used by Tongans and Fijians in the 1980s and 1990s. The word list is a reference document for marine scientists, fishers, environmentalists, and other work focussed on the maritime cultures of the Pacific, local languages and the nomenclature of fishes.

## INTRODUCTION

As shown by a current global survey of information on characteristics of marine species with medicinal and tonic food value (Perry 1998, Perry and Vincent 1998), there is substantial interest and significance today in the taxonomy, distribution and identification of reef and ocean species. The marine fauna of the Pacific no doubt will be exploited with greater intensity in the future. Therefore information on known fish species recorded in the field may have value for research on species diversity and conservation. Knowledge and nomenclature of species used by indigenous people is a fundamental component of environmental information.

The people of the islands of Tonga and Fiji in West Polynesia exploit reef and offshore zones for many species that have subsistence, ceremonial and commercial value. This paper provides an original record of fish names in the Tongan and Fijian languages that I compiled through consultation with local fisherfolk during field work at these two places.

## METHOD AND CONTEXT

In the past this kind of information has been used by linguists to reconstruct the relations among Pacific Islands' languages and as a key to understanding ancient settlement and migration. The *Handbook for the Collection of Fish Names in Pacific*

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*Languages* by Gary L. Barnett (1978) was designed for this purpose. The old indigenous terms were important in that work and, as C. Clerk (1980) pointed out in his review of the Handbook, several problems arise in trying to apprehend the ancient indigenous terms in the late twentieth century. Contemporary concerns for the marine environment, maintenance of the diversity of species, and potential uses of marine species as foods, tonics and medicines give these data new value and historical relevance, especially since these interests are growing at the same time that foreign names are replacing old terms in many local native languages.

The approach used to record these data on fish was to consult men who fished as their main economic activity. The Tongan source was a fisherman aged 36 years and living on Ovaka in 1982, who stated that he learned the names as a youth from his father in Vava'u. The source for the Fiji data also was an active diver and fisherman, aged approximately 30 years in 1996, who reported that he learned the terms on Taveuni fishing with his classificatory brothers, one of whom we consulted on several Fijian terms. In the evenings, after fishing on the reef or processing sea cucumber on shore, we sat together and examined the Handbook illustrations and descriptions as the basis to make a written record of the names of the fishes. A limit on this method is that identification of the fish rely on visual and descriptive recognition of the the fish types represented in the reference material by the indigenous sources. On this basis, the Handbook provided a useful tool for collecting contemporary fish names, and of the 50 fishes listed and illustrated, it was possible to record 48 names in the Fijian language and 49 names in the Tongan language.

These consultations with local sources in Tonga and Fiji produced the record of data listed in the accompanying table. The record consists of English names, taxonomic identifications, and the terms given in Tonga and in Fiji.

A description of the two sites in the Pacific Islands and orientation to the orthography and pronunciation of the respective languages places the data into a context and assists readers to use these terms for fishes.

## THE SITES

The data are from two specific locations in Tonga and Fiji. The Tonga site was Ovaka Island, in the Vava'u Group of Islands. The Fiji site was Taveuni Island and offshore Nukusemanu Islet in the northeast of the Fiji archipelago. These two sites are approximately 600 miles apart under prevailing southeasterly winds and in ancient times the Tongans and Fijians were in regular contact by canoe voyages. Economic links between Tonga and Fiji related to differences between the environments of the island groups. The Vava'u Group are dry islands that lack rivers and irrigation, while Taveuni is a wet island with many streams and cultivations in the valleys along the shores.

The Vava'u Islands are located at 18°40' S and 174° W. The group is a raised coral formation that evidences a complex geohistory of uplifting and subsidences that

created the islands.<sup>2</sup> The whole group is tilted from high cliffs on the north shore of the main island 'Uta Vava'u. From these cliffs, the landscape generally grades down to small coral islands in the south and west and extensive reefs across the fringe of the group. Ovaka, where I collected the Tonga language terms, is one of the small southern islands of this Motu district and its inhabitants have made intensive use of their reefs and waters in collecting and fishing for many purposes, including for subsistence foods, ceremonial foods, and for commodity sale. Women concentrate on the inshore zone along shelves and shallow reefs. Men undertake fishing by line, net and freedive spearing methods offshore and in the deep lagoon inside the fringing reef islands.

By contrast, Taveuni Island, at 16°40' S and 180° longitude, was volcanic in origin.<sup>3</sup> A central ridge of crags and old volcanic craters rises abruptly from the northeastern shore. Many rivers flow from these heights, through narrow estuaries across the shore zone into the sea, and their fresh waters reduce the salinity along the inshore zone. In Fiji there is greater local diversity in water environment conditions than in Tonga. Offshore from volcanic Taveuni, some small dry coral islands rise out of shallow reefs that are rich in marifauna. Sea clans of Fijians rely on these species for subsistence and ceremonial usages and also have come to concentrate on the collection and processing of sea cucumber, a historically important commodity, that has been the object of renewed demand in the 1990s for export to Asia and North America. The gender-spatial division of labour in fishing communities is similar to that described for Tonga.

Both the Taveuni, Fiji, and Vava'u, Tonga, sites lie west of the Andesite Line that runs between Fiji-Tonga and Samoa. There are differences in the diversity of animals and birds on Taveuni and Vava'u respectively, with Taveuni having many more species, while the marine fauna represented in the named fishes were reported by local sources at both sites.

## ORTHOGRAPHY AND PRONUNCIATION

Tongan is a relatively homogenous language spoken throughout the kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Variations in pitch and tone may be heard in different parts of the country. Comparison of these terms from the Motu district of the the Vava'u Group with names from other parts of Tonga remains to be done. Key points of pronunciation in Tongan relating to consonants are that: the *ng* is rolled together as in "sing"; the *p* represents the sound between b and p; also the *t* stands in the absence of a d, there being 12 consonant sounds represented in the Tongan writing system. Vowel length is marked in Tongan by the use of a macron (  $\bar{\quad}$  ) to signify a long vowel.

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<sup>2</sup>This description is based on my study and observations on Vava'u. For a discussion of the geology of the Tonga Islands see Ewart and Bryan (1973).

<sup>3</sup>On the geology of Taveuni Island, see Latham and Denis (1980) and T. Bayliss-Smith *et al* (1988:13-43).

<sup>4</sup>For discussion of features of the Tongan language and writing system, see the authoritative dictionary of Churchward (1959).

Table 1: Names of Fishes in Tonga and Fiji

<u>No.</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Taxonomic</u>	<u>Tongan</u>	<u>Fijian</u>
1.	tiger shark	<i>Galeocerdo cuvieri</i>	'anga takaneva	qio saqa
2.	grey reef shark	<i>Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos</i>	'anga	qio dravu
3.	hammerhead shark	<i>Sphyrna lewini</i>	mātai	qio ulu tu'i
4.	eagle ray	<i>Aetobatus narinari</i>	fai sikoā	vai tonotono
5.	manta ray	<i>Manta birostris</i>	fai manu	vevewai
6.	moray eel	<i>Gymnothorax</i> sp.	toke	dabea
7.	emperor	<i>Lethrinus olivaceus</i>	ngutukao	do'o ni vudi
8.	emperor	<i>Lethrinus erythracanthus</i>	hoputu	beleni dawa
9.	surgeonfish	<i>Ctenochaetus striatus</i>	pono	balagi
10.	striped surgeonfish	<i>Acanthurus lineatus</i>	tuhi	itasi
11.	unicornfish	<i>Naso unicornis</i>	'ume	ta
12.	rabbitfish	<i>Siganus argenteus</i>	oō	mulu
13.	rudderfish	<i>Kyphosus cinerascens</i>	nue	sirisiriwai
14.	angelfish	<i>Pygoplites diacanthus</i>	sifisifi	siqueleti
15.	squirrelfish	<i>Sargocentron</i> sp.	telekihi	corocoro
16.	batfish	<i>Platax teira</i>	sifisifi naivatu	draunavonu
17.	lunar tail cod	<i>Variola louti</i>	ngatala kula	iinani drala
18.	blue spotted grouper	<i>Cephalopholis argus</i>	ngatala 'uli	ti'ilo
19.	coral trout	<i>Cephalopholis miniatus</i>	ngatala pulepule	'era 'era
20.	giant grouper	<i>Epinephelus lanceolatus</i>	popo	'avu
21.	spotted grouper	<i>Epinephelus tauvina</i>	tonu	moala
22.	snapper	<i>Lutjanus</i> sp.	palu	pa'a se widri
23.	red snapper	<i>Lutjanus</i> sp.	fangamea	bati
24.	oilfish	<i>Ruvettus pretiosus</i>	mōmoto	i'a ni pe'a
25.	jobfish	<i>Aprion virescens</i>	tokoni fusi	utouto

Table 1: Names of Fishes in Tonga and Fiji (continued)

No.	English	Taxonomic	Tongan	Fijian
26.	rainbow runner	<i>Elagatis bipinnulata</i>	'utu mea	drodrolagi
27.	dolphinfish	<i>Coryphaena hippurus</i>	mahimahi	maimai
28.	great barracuda	<i>Sphyaena barracuda</i>	hapatū	ogo
29.	striped marlin	<i>Tetrapturus audax</i>	neiufi	sa' u vorowaqa
30.	sailfish	<i>Istiophorus platypterus</i>	hakulā	sa' u laca
31.	bluefin trevally	<i>Caranx melampygus</i>	lupo	saqa dina
32.	trevally	<i>Caranx sexfasciatus</i>	lupolupo	saqa drau
33.	silver scad	<i>Selar crumenophthalmus</i>	mataheheva	tugadra
34.	skipjack tuna	<i>Katsuwonus pelamis</i>	'atu	i' a seu
35.	yellow-fin tuna	<i>Thunnus albacares</i>	kahikahi	tuna
36.	flying fish	<i>Cypselurus naresii</i>	sikotā tahi	i' a vu' a
37.	needlefish	<i>Strongylura leiura</i>	haku	sa' u
38.	porcupine fish	<i>Diodon hystrix</i>	sokisoki	so' iso' i
39.	pufferfish	<i>Arothron hispidus</i>	te' e te' e	vocivoci
40.	goatfish	<i>Parupeneus</i> sp.	tukuleia	ose
41.	milkfish	<i>Chanos chanos</i>	te' efo	pa' a pa' a
42.	grey mullet	<i>Mugil cephalus</i>	kanahē	anace
43.	maori wrasse	<i>Cheilinus undulatus</i>	tangafa	draudrau
44.	filefish	<i>Aluterus scriptus</i>	papae	?
45.	triggerfish	<i>Balistoides viridescens</i>	hūmu	cumu
46.	parrotfish	<i>Scarus rubroviolaceus</i>	holoveka	ulavi
47.	parrotfish	<i>Chlorurus</i> sp.	menenga	ulavi dogo
48.	parrotfish	<i>Chlorurus microrhinos</i>	sika toki	ulurua
49.	anemonefish	<i>Amphiprion chrysopterus</i>	?	?
50.	remora	<i>Remora remora</i>	teliteli' uli	ba' ewa

Source: RCM. Vava'u, Tonga Field Records, 1982; Taveuni, Fiji Field Records, 1996.

Fiji contains an east - west division of two languages, and dialectal variations.<sup>5</sup> The national dialect of Fijian is built on the Bau dialect. The following points are general conventions in the pronunciation and writing of Fijian. The *b* is pronounced mb as in "number"; the *c* represents the th sound as in "that"; the *n* represents nd sound as in "end"; the *g* stands for the ng sound as in "sing"; and the *q* is pronounced ng as in "finger". In the Wainikeli district of northern Taveuni Island in Fiji, people who have attended school generally speak the national dialect of Fijian. Adults know and use a local dialect which is a little different from national Fijian, mainly in a few regular consonant shifts including the use of a glottal stop ( ' ) in place of the *k*, that occurs in the national form of Fijian.<sup>6</sup> Dixon's (1988) study considers the dialect of nearby Bouma in relation to the national Fijian language. The Fijian names for the fishes are recorded in the local form of the language used customarily in the Wainikeli district of Taveuni Island.<sup>7</sup>

### NAMES AND IDENTIFICATION

The identifications of the fishes listed in the table are based on the taxonomic and photographic information provided in Barnett (1978) and in Randall, Allen and Steene (1990), which proved necessary to resolve certain difficulties with taxonomy and English common names encountered in the Handbook. The identifications in the working record in the field were accurate as far as the illustrations and descriptions in the Handbook accurately indicated the fish shown. Where the species attribution seemed questionable, I have kept identification at the genus level. The English names vary by location and as far as possible the list employs the common names most familiar across the Islands region in reference to these Pacific fishes. Table 1 records first the English names, the taxonomic names in the second column, then the terms provided in the local languages at the sites of Vava'u, Tonga, and Wainikeli, Taveuni Island, Fiji, as described.

### OBSERVATIONS

Tongan fishers gave the term *lolau* for the profile of the remora, and *laumea* for the suckers of the remora viewed from the top. The filefish was not seen in the waters of the Vava'u Islands in Tonga. The Fijian sources could not provide a name for the anemonefish though said it is possible some old men might have a name. In Vava'u, Tonga, they recognised the anemonefish but said they did not have a name nor catch the anemonefish as it is too small.

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<sup>5</sup>On these features of pronunciation of the local Fijian languages, the interested reader would best consult a native speaker of the language and also examine the official dictionary of Capell (1973) and the word list of Dixon (1988).

<sup>6</sup>Dixon (1988) and Geherty (1983) provide in-depth studies of Fiji area dialects.

<sup>7</sup>In my composition, I write Waini'eli, with a glottal stop, to refer to the language unit and Wainikeli, with a *k*, to refer to the district. The offshore islet Nukusemanu is written on the charts in the national dialect of Fijian and can shift to Nu'usemanu in the customary dialects of north Taveuni. The name Nu'usemanu means "Isle of Birds" as *manu* denotes animals inclusive of birds and the islet is a nesting place for many species of marine birds including frigate birds, boobies and albatrosses.

Correspondences between the Tongan and the Fijian fish names recorded are limited. There are several recognisable cognates, including for example *mahimahi* and *maimai* for the dolphinfish, *haku* and *sa'u* for the needlefish, *kanahe* and *anace* for the grey mullet, *humu* and *cumu* for the triggerfish, etc. Such correspondences as are evident between the Tongan and the Fijian terms do not appear to be particularly systematic for any groupings of the species, morphology or behaviour, beyond the point that *fai* and the cognate *vai* are generic terms for the rays in Tongan and Fijian languages respectively. Regularity between the two languages lies in the predictable consonant shifts in those recognisable terms that are shared.

Fiji shows some intrusion from English, as in "tuna" for yellowfin and that the sources were uncertain about *i'a seu* for skipjack reporting that today Fijians generally call it tuna as well. These intrusions reflect the commercial importance of these fish in Fiji. Indeed, the term tuna is used loosely in Fiji today to refer to at least two species, a trend that highlights the historical value of lists of local names.

It is known from other word lists based on field work in Polynesia that local Polynesian sources may insert terms, often in humour, during vocabulary work. A cited example is the experience of Labillardiere, a "natural philosopher" of the French Enlightenment, who recorded terms for Tongan numerals, and communicated his findings to the Academy of Sciences in Paris, not knowing that the terms for the higher numbers included several obscene words in the Tongan language (see Freeman 1992: 6). While I cross-checked these terms as far as possible in the field to confirm their validity, the fish names presented in this report, as with all data, are subject to verification.

## CONCLUSION

Interest in the diversity and sustainability of species is growing worldwide. As these concerns develop further, the living languages and knowledge of the indigenous people of the Pacific Islands have an importance for general and scientific knowledge. The short survey provides a record of the names of these types of fish as reported by indigenous people in Tonga and Fiji. New names are being incorporated into the local languages. Therefore the record may be of historical relevance. The data have been set in their area and language context to assist study.

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